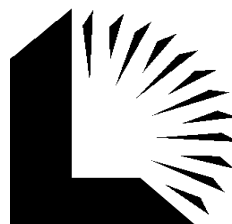
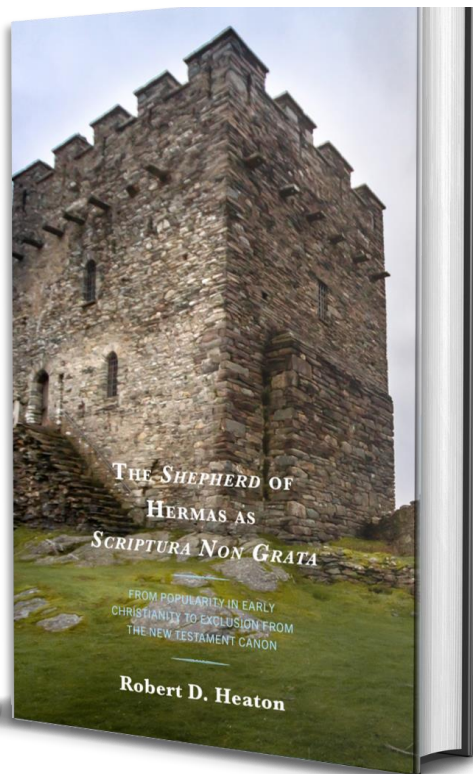


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**THE SHEPHERD OF HERMAS AS SCRIPTURA NON GRATA:  
FROM POPULARITY IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY TO EXCLUSION FROM  
THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON**  
by **Robert D. Heaton**



As a book that almost made into the New Testament, the *Shepherd of Hermas* provides a unique opportunity to study the process of canon formation in the early Church. Why did such a popular book end up excluded from the Christian Bible? Rob Heaton suggests that the answer lies not in the traditional criteria that scholars have developed to explain canonization. Instead, developments in heresiology, Christology, ecclesiastical organization, and concepts of prophecy rendered the Shepherd problematic for powerful bishops like Athanasius of Alexandria. This is a stimulating book filled with thought-provoking positions on several controversial questions.

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Here we have the first comprehensive account of why *The Shepherd*—enormously popular and widely read in the second and third centuries of the Common Era—fell from favor and was deemed heretical in the fourth, despite its lack of overt Christological interest. There are no obvious red flags (though its length does dwarf contemporaneous, early Christian writings). With an astonishingly-researched bibliography Heaton provides a likely rationale. In doing so, his analysis takes on a number of scholarly shibboleths about the history of the Christian canon of scripture and “canonicity” that can no longer bear scrutiny.

— **Gregory Allen Robbins, University of Denver**

### **ABOUT THIS BOOK**

Composed within the first Christian century by a Roman named Hermas, the *Shepherd* remains a mysterious and underestimated book to scholars and laypeople alike. Robert D. Heaton argues that early Christians mainly received the *Shepherd* positively and accepted it unproblematically alongside texts that would ultimately be canonized, requiring decisive actions to exclude it from the late-emerging collection of texts now known as the New Testament. Freshly evaluating the evidence for its popularity in patristic treatises, manuscript recoveries, and Christian material culture, Heaton propounds an interpretation of the *Shepherd* of Hermas as a book meant to guide his readers toward salvation. Ultimately, Heaton depicts the loss of the *Shepherd* from the closed catalogue of Christian scriptures as a deliberate constrictive move by the fourth-century Alexandrian bishop Athanasius, who found it useless for his political, theological, and ecclesiological objectives and instead characterized it as a book favored by his heretical enemies. While the book’s detractors succeeded in derailing its diffusion for centuries, the survival of the *Shepherd* today attests that many dissented from the church’s final judgment about Hermas’s text, which portends a version of early Christianity that was definitively overridden by devotion to Christ himself, rather than principally to his virtues.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Robert D. Heaton** teaches New Testament, Christian Origins, and Early Christianity at Anderson University in Indiana.

Hardback:	ISBN 978-1-66692-186-1	April 2023	Regular price: <del>\$125.00</del>	After discount: <b>\$87.50</b>
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